



BEST TEACHING PRACTICES: APPLYING INNOVATIVE TEACHING METHODS FOR FACILITATING AND LECTURING SENSITIVE DIVERSITY DIMENSION COURSES AND TOPICS

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This paper provides some innovative teaching methods to those who are in the field of teaching and facilitating diversity courses and workshops. The paper also investigates the shortcoming of some educational institutions in the delivery and facilitation of sensitive topics and provides some insights as to why some methods may work better than other teaching/facilitation methods. Though this paper will focus more with those who instruct diversity courses in the educational academic setting, many of the same principles could also be applied to those who facilitate diversity training workshops for corporations and non-profit groups as well.

Keywords: Pedagogy, Properly Facilitate, Sensitive Diversity, Innovative Teaching Methods.

Introduction

In today's contemporary expanding world, the need and the demand in understanding the world that we live and work in is essential. In fact as Michael Barone (2012) points out, "Americans have been investing more and more in education over the years, led by presidents Democratic and Republican. But it's become glaringly clear that we're getting a pretty lousy return on these investments." Some may argue the same when it comes to preparing students/employees for the global market, especially in relations to diversity tolerance. In truth, many universities are increasing money, time and resources to find qualified people to educate college students on how to be culturally sensitive and competent, though some of these investments are not performed wisely. The goals are often to help the student to communicate better with those who they work or attend college with as well as reduce conflict and racism among other things Even down to the elementary school levels, we can see some drastic changes in curriculums to meet the new changing American educational landscape. Like America, other countries are experiencing a major change in their societies simply due to globalization among other reasons. If educators want to continue to remain in the field of education, they will need to apply new methods of teaching and facilitating in order to accommodate to this new expanding educational landscape. For the most part, educators need to apply best teaching practices in order to accommodate to this new changing world if they are to reach all segments they intend to impact. In fact, it is the ethical duty for educators to provide and implement the best teaching methods that will transform the students and employees in the most beneficial impacting way possible. As education expenditures continue to increase so too are the demands of the parents and the clients, which are expecting accountability and exceptional educational service with a great return on

their investment. Educators must see that all involved in the educational system are receiving transparent, accountable and impacting services.

Literature Review

Changes in technology, international commerce, immigration and interracial marriages are changing our culture, attitudes, behaviors and the way we conduct everyday business. Unfortunately, not all businesses and universities have kept up with the pace of the rapid global change. Clearly, pedagogies (Pedagogy) at the college and university levels must change in order to keep pace with the new evolving education markets and the world economy. Though many universities are adjusting for these changes, some are not carrying it out to the best way possible. As Hickling-Hudson, Anne (2003) points out in her article, "Multicultural Education and the Postcolonial Turn," educators need to provide a more culturally proactive schooling and move away from the ethnocentric practices of the past.

Historically, research from the sociology and social work professions have demonstrated that many students from minority families were under served and in some cases damaged by the lack of cultural sensitive class curriculums and culturally sensitive learning environments. If educators are to reverse this trend they are going to need to take some extensive multi-cultural sensitive diversity training classes if they want to meet the new ongoing changing educational environments that continues to expand. The great news is that many universities are aware of this and are taking some form of action. Though many are taking some sort of action, many are not fulfilling the demand utilizing the best teaching methods available.

Even down to the primary elementary level, some major changes are desperately needed. Curriculums should be made to accommodate the diversity. Text books that continue to teach that Christopher Columbus discovered America should be replaced with more up to date, accurate and cultural sensitive text books, with a balanced focus on Native American as well as many of the other ethnic groups that have contributed to American's historical development (Native News Network 2012). Simultaneously, English Literature classes that are very Eurocentric should also consider looking for literature that represents authors from other ethnic groups in order to accommodate the students. Even this would be educational to the Caucasian students. Obviously the need to move away from a Euro and Ethnocentric pedagogy are necessary if the Educators are to correctly transform their students.' Outdated curriculums should replace the former with a more inclusive and global pedagogies that are more beneficial for all.

To make such adjustments, university instructors need to better train their students about diversity, especially those who are molding the minds of the next generation of Educators. In essence, universities need to shape educators' and college students' by raising their awareness about culture, slanted history, and ethnocentric practices of the past.

Little Rock Arkansas Rough Transition of 1957

The **Little Rock Nine** were a group of African American students enrolled in Little Rock Central High School in 1957. The ensuing Little Rock Crisis, in which the students were initially prevented from entering the racially segregated school by Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, but later granted to attend after the intervention of President Eisenhower. The U.S. Supreme Court issued its historic *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, 347 U.S. 483, on May 17, 1954. The decision declared all laws establishing segregated schools to be unconstitutional,

and it called for the desegregation of all schools throughout the nation.^[1] After the decision, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) attempted to register black students in previously all-white schools in cities throughout the South. (Wikipedia 2013)

Although this was an ideal move to help curtail racism and to eliminate segregation in the public school setting, this arguably was not the best approach. The nine African American students experienced a lot of racism and pain as they attempted to break the institutional discrimination cycle. Christine Firer Hinze (2009) noted that, the nine brave African American students were intimidated by the non-African American students such as being spitted on, called awful names and even threatened. If only the Little Rock students' at that time were required to take some 'sensitive diversity' courses and the teachers trained in provided the courses, the transition may have been much smoother for both, the African American student and the Caucasians as well, not to mention the teachers involved.

In essence, we should be learning from our histories and moving forward in the process by not repeating our mistakes. So much was gained and yet still being learned from the Little Rock Arkansas African American pioneers' that their impacts can be felt throughout the United States educational systems. To honor the Little Rock Five, educators need to forge ahead with the best teaching approaches for instructing and facilitating diversity so that they could carry on the vision of the Little Rock Five.

Methodology

Participant observation was implemented as the sole basis of the research. Such research involved a range of well-defined, through variety of methods: informal interviews, direct observation and participation, collective discussions, results from activities undertaken off or online, class surveys, exercises and reports. Over a few years the data was analyzed and interpreted. A few different means were incorporated to get students to express their feeling of the class approach and the structure and their feelings toward the class teaching methods with the online class learning site providing the best way to express feelings. Utilizing that route, student had opportunities to states ones personal thoughts and opinion in an anonymous such way that even the instructor could not identify them.

Surveys were often provided throughout the semester to the students' during different time frames with the end of the semester survey's providing the most valuable data. In order to get students to participate, points were provided for their participation in the surveys.

Over many semesters the author discovered that the system mentioned below appeared to work the best for the student body as well as the instructor/facilitator, reaching its goal of transforming the students mind to a noticeable point that they became more sensitive and caring to anything related to diversity, with the clear understanding of its values, benefits and potentials.

The participants were made up of a large variety of racial backgrounds, incomes, political affiliations, geographic locations, religions, genders and educational backgrounds. While most were American, some were foreigners as well, which only enriched the educational setting as well as the data.

Strategy and Implementation

For many involved in the academia, they are finding the classroom setting to be more diverse, not just in the racial makeup but in the student's ideologies and thinking levels as well.

The mistake that some instructors create when teaching and facilitating diversity workshop and courses, is limiting the meaning of the word diversity. Ultimately, diversity should be more than people who are different in ethnicity and religion or gender appearances, it should also touch on the other dimensions such as intelligent levels, income levels, political party affiliations, learning styles, geographic locations, lifestyles, capacities and functions, among a host of other areas.

In order to even begin to touch on any controversial diversity subjects, it is important for the class setting to be designed in such a way that students' feel safe to speak and express themselves without attacks from others. Simply put, the goal of the instructor is to take the students out of their comfort learning zone. Usually when this is successfully completed, impacting beneficial learning usually occurs, but only with proper facilitation. As a result, new insights and perspectives are gained and usually an increase in compassion and awareness begins to intensify.

According to "Creating a Safe and Engaging Classroom Climate," Students' internal reactions to class activities and classmates-feelings of annoyance, anger, anxiety, surprise, confusion, or defensiveness-may are signs that their way of thinking about things is being challenged. "All learning and change involves some degree of culture shock to the degree that they challenge our basic perspectives. Much can be learned through culture shock that cannot be learned any other way," Tension in the classroom, when it does not get out of control or explode, can prompt learning. Safety is not a goal in itself, but a prerequisite for the kind of classroom climate that can result in learning."(Griffin, Pat 1997).

Protocols should also be implemented into the syllabus on what steps to take if things were to get out of control. With the proper class design this rarely happens but from time to time it does occur, mostly due to the students misunderstanding or lack of communication styles, either it being from expression or listening.

The author first suggestions that an ice breaker exercise be presented followed up with a class break out session for ground rules formation, which is discussed more below. For the ice breaker exercise the professor could go around class and ask each student what is their complete name, their ethnicity (if they know and are willing to share), place they would like to travel, hobby and what they feel about diversity. The exercise helps to break some of the tensions and provides a more comfortable feeling to the environment.

To create an ideal safe learning environment to occur so that students do not become a turtle in a shell, the author highly suggested to design ground rules on the first or second day of class session. In the formation of the ground rules, the facilitator or university instructor should allow the students to participate in the formation of the rules but with the instructor providing the overall say (This same method needs to be implemented with workshops as well). This provides the students/participants an opportunity to set the climate for the class as well as put a stake into the rule formation. Often, when the idea/suggestions comes from the students, they are more likely to abide to the rules as some research indicates. Some examples of ground rules for guiding the class may be:

- Agree to disagree
- Do not burst out loud
- Come to class on time
- All cell phone devices off
- All laptops devices off
- Respect the facilitator/Instructor

- Attack the idea and not the person
- Use I instead of you words to address feelings
- Be polite and consider time management in classroom discussions
- Use I instead of you words to address feelings
- Give it time to digest what others say-do not be quick to speak
- Ask for elaborations if you are not clear
- What is said in class stays in class

The Author suggests that the facilitator to have their own personal protocols in place on how to remove or redirect a student who may be threatening or uncooperative once the class room debate and discussion moves into full swing. By no means should a student leave class upset at themselves and or at another student body. This creates a very unhealthy and unsafe learning environment. As part of the ground rule formation it should be a rule that a student stay after class to discuss in more detail with the instructor and or student about their anger or concerns.

Add Impacting Philosophy to the Class Setting

For the most part, the author has some basic philosophies in place on the first day in which is shared. It is highly recommended that these be implemented by the facilitators/educator, no matter if it is in a university setting and or company workshop setting. The author who teaches Diversity Dimensions for a number of universities has a few foundation rules that is laid out in all of the classes and workshops. According to the author, "Learning is a process. Some learn faster than others and that is okay. In fact, it could take some time to digest and accept new information. For instance, if someone asked you who discovered America you may be quick to answer Christopher Columbus when in fact it was the Native American people who discovered the land. Clearly, when a person is told new information that goes against all that they have learned and memorized in their past, it could take some time to adapting- both in learning and gaining new perspective." (Hodshire 2010).

Another philosophy that the author expresses to his students is "All theories have their time, place and limitations. For instance, what works in the United States may not work in China or perhaps it does work but not to the same scale. Be sure not to mainstream your thoughts and perspectives and more importantly, be prepared to modify them." Hodshire 2010.

Everyone in the university teaching profession must stay mindful that they are a learner as well as a teacher. In the diversity sensitivity fields there are always opportunities to learn from the students, even if the instructor is the expert.

Within a few class sessions, the instructor should start to explain to the students the theory behind embracing diversity and its implications. For example, embracing diversity brings innovative new ideas to the forefront, it brings solutions to complex problems, it promotes better democracy, fairness and increase work performance; it also creates better caring citizens among other things. Some examples of major institutions who embrace diversity: NASA, CIA, US Military, major US universities, Stryker, Ford, Whirlpool, Dell to name a few. Hopefully, as the class progresses, the student will gain a new perspective and start to take a new interest in things around them that they took for granted before enrolling into the class.

Moving to the Next Stage

After the formation of ground rules and the professor's philosophical stage, the facilitator should then proceed to other subject areas. Classroom seating arrangements, group projects and cell phones should be considered and discussed. Jim Winship, known for his teaching diversity courses: "An Approach for teaching Diversity" provides these suggestions.

- Arrange the classroom in a way that maximizes interaction; ideally, students should be seated in a circle or horseshoe shape that maximizes the amount of eye contact students can have with each other.
- Encourage but not compel participation in whole class discussions. The teacher may state that s/he will not call on students individually to participate, and students have the right to not participate. The teacher can bring people into discussion indirectly- using prompts, eye contact, and statements such as "Let's hear from the back (or second) row" or "Let's hear from some people who haven't been talking." Perhaps most importantly, do not expect minority students to educate their peers, to speak for their race or group.
- Be clear about the distinctions between course grades, teacher expectations of students, and class norms.
- Introduce the concept of triggers.
- Model learning about diversity.
- Actively intervene in the class when necessary.

(Jim Winship 2005). More information could be accessed at the end of the article.

All sensitive topics should be discussed and the rules applied. For example, if a female student revealed that she is a lesbian, then that should remain in class. This is not only for the student's safety but it also limits gossip too. Again, the ultimate goal is not only for creating a safe learning environment but also maintaining a safe learning environment that will foster creativity and ongoing classroom dialogue.

Disaster can creep up and rather fast in the classroom setting if the proper rules are not designed and implemented. In fact, some professors have quit their jobs in the middle of the semester because the debates in class became too heated and the conflict too uncomfortable, while other professors have been removed by university departments altogether because of the professors lack of proper training and facilitation methods. If one is not careful, they could create more harm than help.

Ideally, some instructors from the social sciences feel that they could go right into the class and start teaching it without the proper training, understanding and insights. Usually, these types of instructors highly limit where they go with the sensitive subjects that need to be discussed and or skip the sensitive topics altogether, which does no service to the student. Even worse, some instructors do not even teach the proper meaning to what diversity is in today's contemporary world. This will catch up with the students later down the road in their careers when they discover that they did not receive the proper training from the class that they invested so much time, money and energy into.

Besides teaching from the text book that is specifically designed for teaching diversity sensitive topics and issues, instructors/educators need to have interesting and evidenced based assignments and exercises for the students to participate in and complete. Below are the best suggestions to add meaning as well as reinforce the text book when instructing and facilitating

diversity. These are highly suggested by the author to add to all of the instructor's classroom diversity sessions and in some cases where it is feasible, workshop session as well.

Class Assignment Examples

In Class Exercise

The students are to break up into selected groups where they are provided with racial insulting racist cards to discuss and debate on. They must determine if what is said on the cards are racist to some and if so, how? This is an important exercise because many companies continue to use racist logos and other marketing tools to brand their products. This especially is a major issue with the Native American community today where college and professional teams are misrepresenting the Native American Tribes and cultures. After spending 30-40 minutes on the class exercise, the students' will begin to understand in more depth as to why these debates come up with minority groups and why improper representation of an ethnic group is unethical, degrading and damaging to one's own imagine and self-esteem (**Hodshire 2012**).

Taking Students Out into the Community (Class Assignments/Exercises)

Like diversity, learning approaches should be diverse as well as fun. There is no reason why students cannot move outside of the classroom walls and still learn in the process. That said, it is highly recommended by the author to take each class out into the community, preferably downtown, to apply what was learned in class to the real world. The assignment should take place toward the end of the semester and preferably in your nearby downtown. The students are to research the type of businesses located in downtown and who do they cater too? Are the businesses catering to a diverse crowd? Are there stores that cater to the low, middle and high class? Are there restaurants that cater to different ethnic groups and incomes? How about housing and mixed building uses? Any entertainment that caters to seniors, the young, middle age and children populations? How about sports teams? What type of athletic sports teams is located and are they affordable to attend? The questions above are prime examples to get the students thinking about diversity and what it encompasses, especially in relations to cool cities initiatives and people's lifestyles.

Final Report

According to the author's years of teaching experiences and survey reports, it is highly recommended that student's taking a semester class in diversity dimensions to do a class report on ethnic groups, preferably of one other than their very own. Though this is not to be confused with a family tree report, the report digs deep into ethnic group's culture, traditions, religions, geographic locations, histories, so forth. The student should be allowed to explore and to be creative with the report, even adding cultural recipes if so desired. The usual response in the beginning is the students are not thrilled but by the end they are very entertained by the report and privileged with what they have learned in the process. To add, the students should be required to present their findings up in front of class the last day. Sharing with the class what they have learned will benefit everyone. This collective learning session that benefits all, while at the same time, help students to change their perspectives about other ethnic groups that they may

have limited opportunities in knowing and learning from in their given environments. This is an ideal place to go to learn about others cultures and countries as well. www.CIA.gov

Evaluation

In all type of diversity teaching settings, evaluations should be implemented throughout the course/workshops. This provides the facilitator some valuable input of the students' progress as well as their lack of understanding too. More significantly, it could be used as a prevention measure too. The author does one in the beginning of the class followed by one at the end too, though not in all sessions. It is called the "Temperature Check" session and works more like a non-traditional evaluation. Basically the instructor asks the students before the class starts 'How is your day so far'? The students are to respond with their thumbs with the thumbs up being real good, thumbs tilted sideways as so so and the thumbs pointing downward as not good at all. The instructor adjusted his lesson plan accordingly. Perhaps it may be exam week for some students, while for others a stressful day at work. Adding humor and changing things up in class (for example doing some class activities) from time to time helps ease the students stress levels.

Ideally, some major evidence based evaluations should be provided in class about one fourth of the way through the semester in terms of surveys as well as mid way through and at the end of the semester, with the emphasis being on the final survey. This not only provides the instructor with some valuable input for improvement, it also may demonstrate what he/she is doing well.

Simultaneously, evaluation/surveys also may empower the student by making them feel more inclusive. The survey could be used as a preventative tool too for what not to do or do for next class-valuable input from the customer.

As a golden rule, all surveys should remain anonymous unless the student wants to identify themselves to the instructor on the survey itself.

Review

As procedure, the author finds it to be beneficial if at the second class session that a review of the ground rules that was designed by the class are briefly reviewed. The ultimate goal is to design a class where the class conduct rotates around the ground rules and that the ground rules are to be honored and or referred to in all circumstances. In some cases where the debates become heated, it is usually the students who redirect the others, reminding them to revisit the ground rules from time to time, upholding strong ethics and presenting leadership in doing so.

Author

As time progresses, it appears that even text books that are designed to teach diversity are not doing it completely professional. For instance, some diversity text books are still referring to President Obama as the First African American President ignoring his whiteness and resorting back to the old southern black rule. A better and more correct term would be the First Bi-Racial African American President. Though not intentional, educators must be conscious with history and the current world so that we can in return, reach a larger audience and in a more positive productive impacting accurate way. Educators must be mindful not to distort or misrepresent truth and reality. Choosing the proper text for the class is crucial for the class to learn and grow.

Conclusion

Teaching and facilitating diversity is no easy task. However, educators that are well skilled, up-to-date and competent in the diversity pedagogy fields may find teaching the course enjoyable and rewarding, especially when they personally see their students' transformed. Though more companies and universities are embracing Diversity Sensitivity type of courses, it does not necessary mean that they are teaching the materials properly and in the best way possible. As mentioned above, it is highly recommended by the author to add ice-breaker exercises, ground rules, class assignments, class exercise, class reports, survey's and out of class philosophical components, etc, to enrich the class learning and help to make the facilitation and debates more meaningful. Best teaching and facilitating methods must be mastered and applied if instructors are to impact their students for the academic and global markets. If done properly, the student should be transformed in such a way that they become more of a sensitive caring citizen, ideally a globalized caring citizen.

For more information on Facilitating and Best Teaching Practices and or workshops and trainings, please refer to the following sites listed below.

<http://www.wmich.edu/facdev/Programs/EveryoneCounts.html>

<http://www.uww.edu/learn/diversity/dozensuggestions.php>

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001365/136583e.pdf>

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